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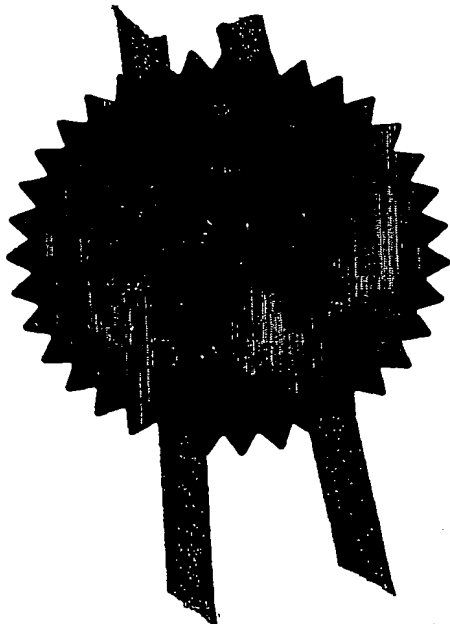
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Signed *A. B. Jones*

Dated 6 March 2003

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23.1.3

GB0210978.3

By virtue of a direction given under Section 30 of the Patents Act 1977, the application is proceeding in the name of:-

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Isleworth  
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TW7 5DZ  
United Kingdom  
Incorporated in the United Kingdom

ADP Number: 08553018001



THE PATENT OFFICE

B

14 MAY 02 1834Z-1 C85076  
F01/7700-0-00-0210978.3

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14 MAY 2002

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2. Patent application number

(The Patent Office will fill in this part)

0210978.3

14 MAY 2002

3. Full name, address and postcode of the or of each applicant (underline all surnames)

KERON ENGINEERING LTD  
4 CONDUIT ROAD  
BEDFORD MK40

Patents ADP number (if you know it)

If the applicant is a corporate body, give the country/state of its incorporation

8382277

SECTION 30(1)(77 ACT) APPLICATION FILED 23/1/02  
BRITAIN

4. Title of the invention

FLOATING SEMI-SUBMERSIBLE OIL PRODUCTION  
AND STORAGE ARRANGEMENT

5. Name of your agent (if you have one)

"Address for service" in the United Kingdom to which all correspondence should be sent (including the postcode).

AA THOMSON & CO,  
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15/1/77  
23/1/02

Patents ADP number (if you know it)

75001.

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Country

Priority application number  
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Date of filing  
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Number of earlier application

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- a) any applicant named in part 3 is not an inventor, or
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Claim(s)

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Statement of inventorship and right to grant of a patent (Patents Form 7/77)

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Request for substantive examination (Patents Form 10/77)

Any other documents (please specify)

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I/We request the grant of a patent on the basis of this application.

Signature

N. J. Keon

Date

13/5/2002

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12. Name and daytime telephone number of person to contact in the United Kingdom

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## **FLOATING SEMI-SUBMERSIBLE OIL PRODUCTION, STORAGE AND OFFLOADING ARRANGEMENT**

The oil industry frequently makes use of floating production and storage systems for developing small remote oil fields. These generally use a converted crude oil tanker moored to a purpose built mooring buoy. To minimise the wave, current and wind forces on the tanker, the mooring is designed to allow the vessel to weathervane around the buoy under the influence of the resultant environmental force. Processing equipment is mounted on the deck of the vessel.

Oil production from the reservoir is via one or more sub sea wellheads, through a flexible flowline from each wellhead to the mooring buoy and from the buoy to the vessel. The system also incorporates lines to carry gas and /or water from the vessel to the wellheads. Also incorporated are hydraulic and electrical lines from the vessel to allow control of the sub sea wellheads. Since the vessel must be free to rotate around the buoy, the numerous fluid flow paths through the buoy result in the need for a complicated and expensive device known as a swivel. This is a precision-engineered piece of equipment subject to high pressure, high temperature corrosive fluids from the reservoir and hence must be manufactured faultlessly if high maintenance costs are to be avoided.

A further disadvantage of floating production systems that employ oil tankers is that they are highly susceptible to pitching, rolling and heaving. Since the separation of the oil, water and gas which comprise the fluid stream from the reservoir is effected by means of gravity separation in large pressure vessels, the sloshing of the liquids caused by the ships motion can cause serious inefficiencies in the separation process.

An alternative type of floating production system which eliminates these problems is use of a semi-submersible vessel. Semi-submersible vessels have been used in the offshore industry for a number of years as mobile drilling vessels, crane barges, pipelaying vessels and dedicated floating production vessels. As shown in Figure 1, a semi-submersible vessel comprises a deck 1, supported above the water line (OWL) on a number of pontoons 30. The columns extend from the deck to (typically) two flotation pontoons 31 located some distance below the water line. The advantages of a semi-submersible over a ship-shaped vessel are two-fold. Firstly, the area exposed to the waves at the water line is less for a semi-submersible than for a ship-shaped vessel and hence the horizontal wave forces are reduced. Secondly, because the pontoons which provide the buoyancy are much further below the water line than the underside of a ship, the vertical forces are much less. (This is because the effects of a wave rapidly decrease as one moves deeper in to the water)

The results of these advantages are that semi-submersible production vessels can be moored in the ocean without the need to provide weather vaning and that the sloshing of liquids in vessels on the deck is reduced.

Semi-submersible floating production systems (SSFP systems) however have two disadvantages. Firstly, there is no significant capability for storage of the produced oil. This means that they can only be utilised where a pipeline is provided to carry the produced oil to an onshore storage/processing facility or where a dedicated moored tanker ship is provided adjacent to the SSFP vessel.

The second disadvantage is that the amount of processing equipment which can be fitted on deck is limited because the centre of gravity of the SSFP vessel is raised as weight is added to the deck. This reduces the resistance to overturning of the vessel. This resistance to overturning is quantified in a property of the vessel known as the metacentric height (usually designated GM). A high GM means a high resistance to overturning.

A number of oil fields have been developed using a SSFP vessel which have used a converted second hand semi-submersible drilling vessel. Where the produced oil is viscous and needs large

pressure vessels for separation or where gas injection or water injection equipment is required, new larger semi-submersibles are required to accommodate the equipment.

A number of attempts have been made to provide oil storage in a semi-submersible (British Patent Applications GB22116849, GB 2207892, GB 2188291 for example) However, these allow storage of only a relatively small quantity of oil. These systems still require a dedicated moored tanker to store a marketable quantity of oil. The storage provided in the semi-submersible vessel only provides storage of a few days production to allow the storage tanker to travel to a nearby refinery for offloading.

According to the present invention there is provided an arrangement for the storage of oil at a semi-submersible floating production vessel comprising a deck structure which is carried by means of a plurality of columns and pontoons characterized in that a reinforced concrete tank is attached below the pontoons, said concrete tank being subdivided into a plurality of chambers for storage of oil.

The present invention preferably provides a semi-submersible, floating production, storage and offloading system for the development of offshore oil and gas fields comprising a converted semi-submersible drilling vessel, a segmented, reinforced concrete or reinforced and prestressed concrete tank attached to the base of the drilling vessel, means for utilising the drilling vessel's ballast pumps for removal of water from the bottom of each concrete tank segment, means of directing produced oil into or out of the top of each tank segment.

A specific embodiment of the invention will now be described by way of example with reference to the accompanying drawings in which:-

Figure 1 shows a typical semi-submersible floating production system;

Figure 2 shows in perspective a semi-submersible drilling rig with a concrete tank attached in accordance with the present invention;

Figure 3 shows a sectional elevation of the drilling rig of Figure 2;

Figure 4 is a schematic diagram of the layout of the connection between the chambers of the concrete tank of Figures 2 and 3;

Figures 5 & 6 are further schematic diagrams showing how the chambers are connected; and

Figure 7 shows additional detail of the drilling rig of Figures 2 and 3.

Figure 8 shows an alternative gas/oil/water loading offloading arrangement

Referring first to figure 2, the drilling rig 1 has a concrete tank 2 attached below columns 30 and the pontoons 31.

As shown in Figure 3, the concrete tank is segmented by internal concrete walls 3. At least one cell in the centre of the tank is constructed to be open at top and bottom to create a hole through the centre of the tank whereby the rig can carryout drilling or workover operations with the tank attached.

Also shown in Figure 3 for one chamber are the water inlet/outlet pipe 4 and the oil inlet/outlet pipe 5. The water pipe terminates in a diffuser pipe 6 close to the bottom of the chamber which minimises mixing of the oil and water as water is pumped in. The oil pipe terminates at the inner face of the upper surface to avoid the possibility of build-up of a gas pocket. To maintain the mass of the tank and contents constant as oil is produced or offloaded only 4/5 of the chambers operate on the oil over water principle shown in figure 3. The remaining 1/5 of the chambers utilise a gas over oil scheme employing piping as shown in Figure 6. Oil enters the first chamber A through oil pipe 9. As chamber A fills with oil, natural gas is vented via pipe 10 to chamber B and hence to the final gas vent pipe 11. When chamber A is full, oil spills in to chamber B and the process continues until all chambers are full. This process proceeds at the same time that 4/5 of the oil is being directed to the oil over water chambers. Because the density of crude oil is approximately 4/5 that of sea water this arrangement maintains a constant mass in the tank as oil is loaded or offloaded. These arrangements minimise the free surfaces of liquids inside the chambers which is beneficial to the stability of the vessel.

1 alternative arrangement to achieve this mass balance is shown in Figure 8. In this arrangement the loading system is identical for all chambers. Seawater inlet/outlet pipes are provided at the bottom of the chambers, oil inlet/outlet pipes are provided at 4/5 of the height of the chamber and natural gas inlet pipes are provided in the upper surface of the chambers. When no oil is on board, every chamber is filled 4/5 with seawater with natural gas above. As oil is produced it enters via oil pipe 25 and seawater is displaced via water pipe 26. At the same time, natural gas is released via the gas inlet/outlet pipe to ensure that the volume of water displaced by the oil is only 4/5 of the volume of oil entering.

The invention is further characterised by the fact that the mass of tank and contents is slightly greater than the buoyancy of the tank. This means that to bring the combined semi-submersible/tank structure to the same draft that the semi-submersible normally operates uncombined, some ballast water must be removed from the semi-submersible causing a further improvement in the metacentric height of the combined vessel. This arrangement creates a tensile force between the tank and rig.

A further characterisation of the invention is that this tensile force can be changed to a compressive force which is beneficial to the fatigue life of the vessel by eliminating any gap between the underside of the semi-submersible pontoons and the upper surface of the tank.

By constructing the base of the tank of a material of greater density than the roof, the centre of gravity of the tank and contents is slightly below the centre of buoyancy of the tank. This increases the metacentric height of the vessel allowing an increased payload to be added to the deck of the semi-submersible.

The volume of the tank is sufficiently large such that when the tank is empty, with the drilling rig attached above it, the upper surface of the tank is a considerable distance above the water line. This allows access to the piping above the upper tank surface, to the manholes in the tank for internal inspections, to the tank-to-semi-submersible connections and to all external parts of the semi-submersible. This allows the inspections required by classification societies to be carried out without the vessel needing to go to dry dock. The only parts of the vessel not inspectable in the dry are the underside and lower walls of the tank. Since the tank is constructed of concrete, periodic visual inspection by divers or remote underwater vehicle is considered sufficient.

Concrete as a structural material behaves best when loaded in compression. Tensile forces must be resisted by reinforcing steel embedded in the concrete. The required quantity of reinforcing steel can be minimised by maintaining the external pressure on the tank greater than the internal pressure. To achieve this the water outlet line from each oil-over-water chamber is connected to a breaktank 12 located inside a column of the semi-submersible as shown in Figure 7. This breaktank is located below the elevation of the operating water level (OWL). The breaktank is vented to atmosphere 13 and the water level in the breaktank is maintained by level switches 14 and 15 acting on the semi-submersible's seawater ballast pump 16 and control valve 17 to add or remove water as necessary. To ensure that the oil system cannot overpressure the tank, the oil inlet/outlet is vented to atmosphere at a safe location 18.

Large centrifugal pumps 19 are required to offload the stored oil into shuttle tankers. Such pumps require a net positive suction head (NPSH) on their suction side in order to function effectively. Normally this is achieved by locating the pumps at a lower elevation than the bottom of the storage tank. The arrangement of the present invention allows the pumps to be located above the top of the tanks in a caisson attached to one of the semi-submersible columns where they can easily be removed by one of the rig cranes for maintenance but still be provided with a net positive suction head.

Also shown in Figure 7 are an oil export meter 20, a ballast water cleanup device 21, an oil in water alarm 22 and a gas/oil/water separator 23.

The invention is also characterised by the fact that all necessary valving, pumps and instrumentation for the seawater system can be located inside the columns of the semi-submersible where they are in a dry, benign environment and can be easily accessed for maintenance.

The invention requires no pipes or fittings protruding from the bottom of the tank. This allows easy construction onshore, skidding of the tank into the ocean, setting the tank on a suitable seabed for fitting to the semi-submersible.

The invention is also characterised by the ability to construct the connection between the tank and the semi-submersible rig in the dry even though this connection is underwater during normal operation. Once constructed the tank will be set on the seabed with a few metres of water above it. The semi-submersible at its minimum draft will be floated over the tank and deballasted down on to the top of the tank. The tank is then deballasted sufficient to lift the semi-submersible clear of the water allowing the permanent connection to be constructed in the dry.



# **FLOATING SEMI-SUBMERSIBLE OIL PRODUCTION AND STORAGE ARRANGEMENT**

## **ABSTRACT**

An arrangement for the storage of marketable quantities of crude oil at a semi-submersible floating production vessel. The storage is achieved by hanging a segmented reinforced concrete tank to the underside of the semi-submersible vessel. The semi-submersible vessel can be an existing semi-submersible drilling rig. By maintaining the mass of the tank and contents slightly greater than the displacement of the tank and by arranging the centre of gravity of the tank below its centre of buoyancy, the metacentric height of the semi-submersible vessel is improved. The storage arrangement for the oil provides the necessary maintenance of mass by either storing approximately 4/5 of the oil in oil-over-water chambers and approximately 1/5 in gas-over-oil chambers or by using a gas-over-oil-over-water arrangement in all the chambers. The piping arrangements minimise the free surface of liquids in the tank. The design ensures the internal pressure in the tank can be less than the external pressure which minimises required reinforcement. The design provides a net positive suction head to oil export pumps located above the storage tank in a location which allows easy maintenance. The design allows all pumps, valves and instrumentation necessary for handling ballast water to be maintained within the hull of the semi-submersible where they can be easily maintained. The design allows all the valves, pumps and instrumentation necessary for handling oil to be in locations where they can be easily maintained.

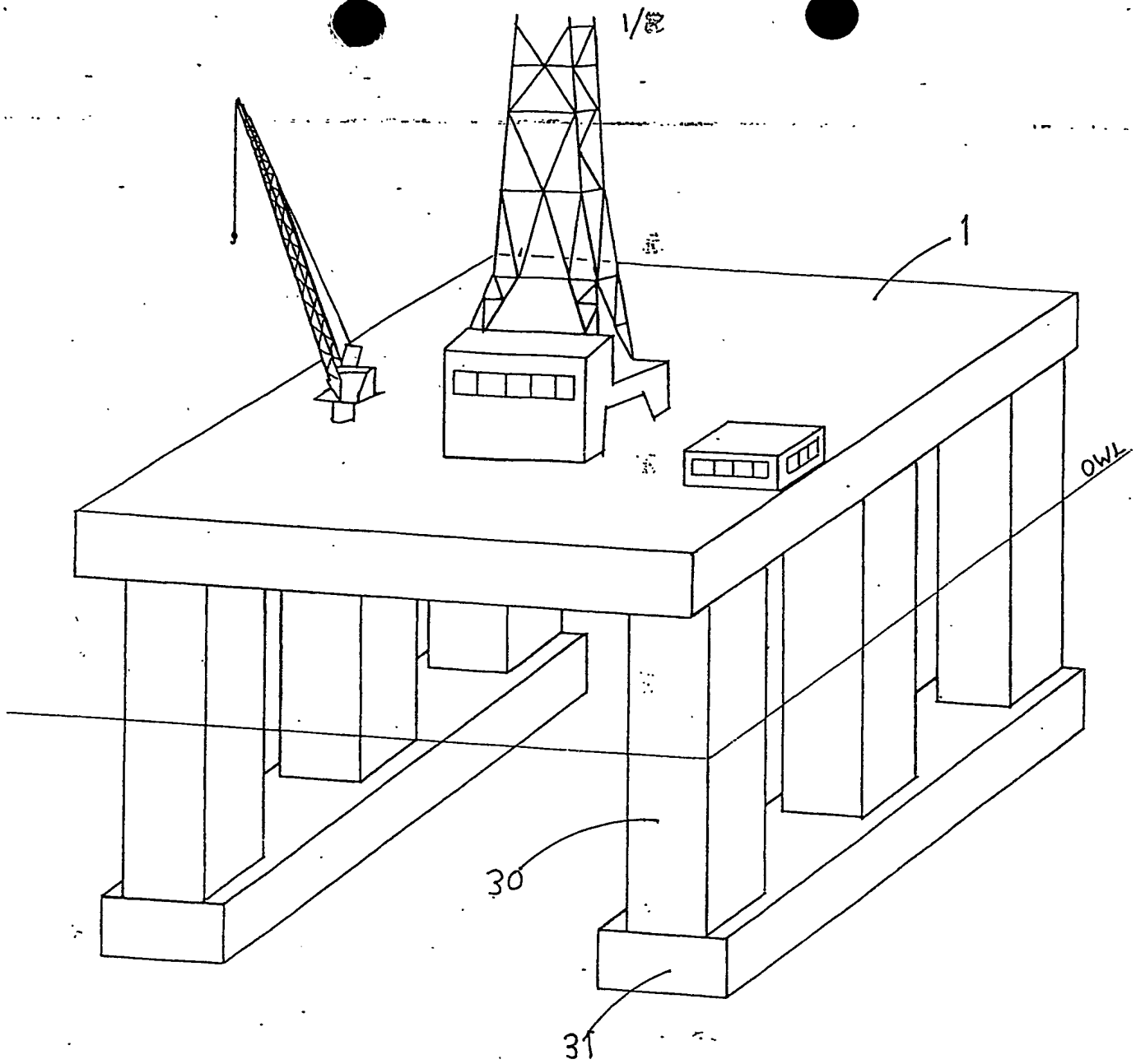


Fig 1

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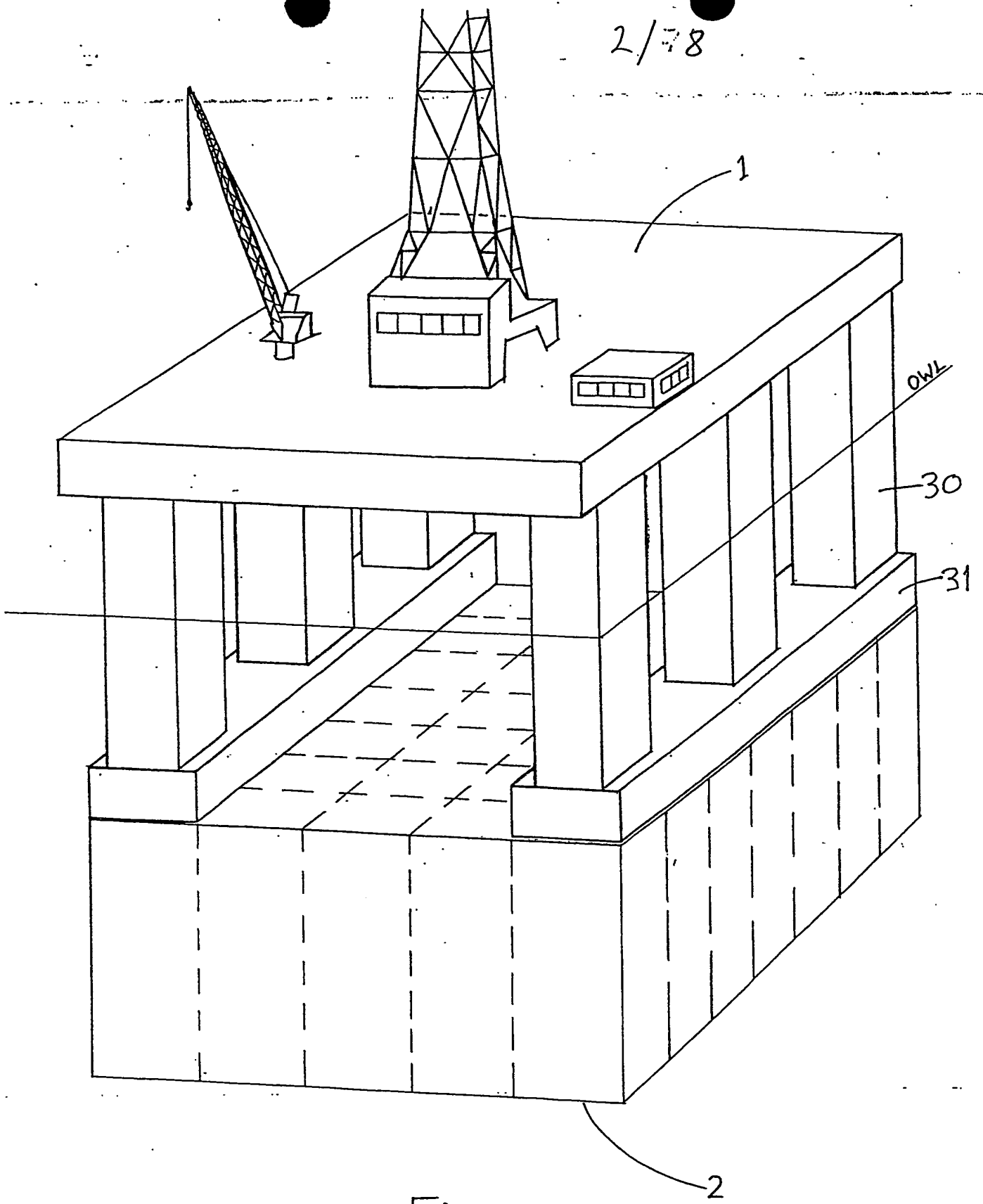


Fig 2

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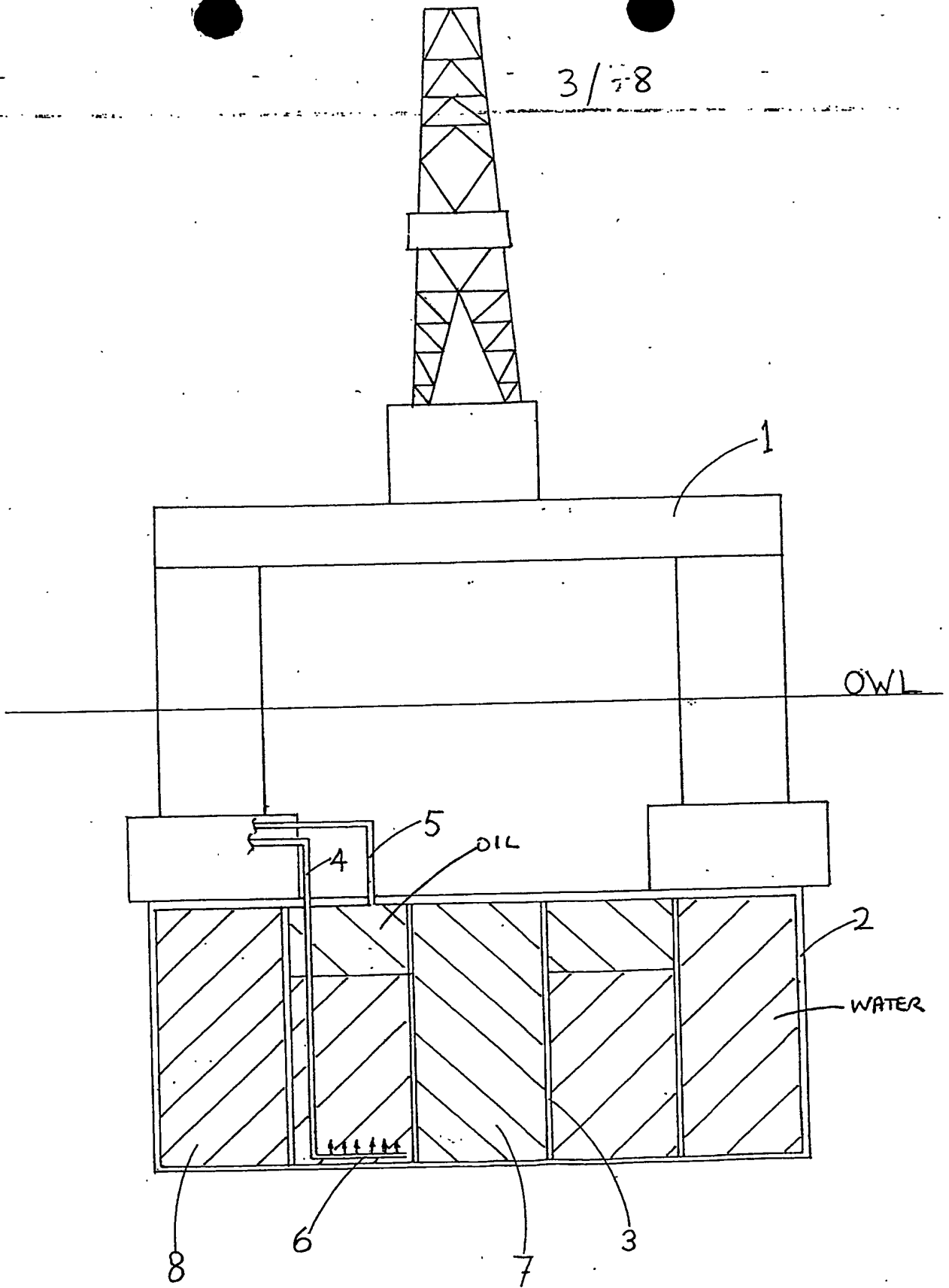


Fig 3

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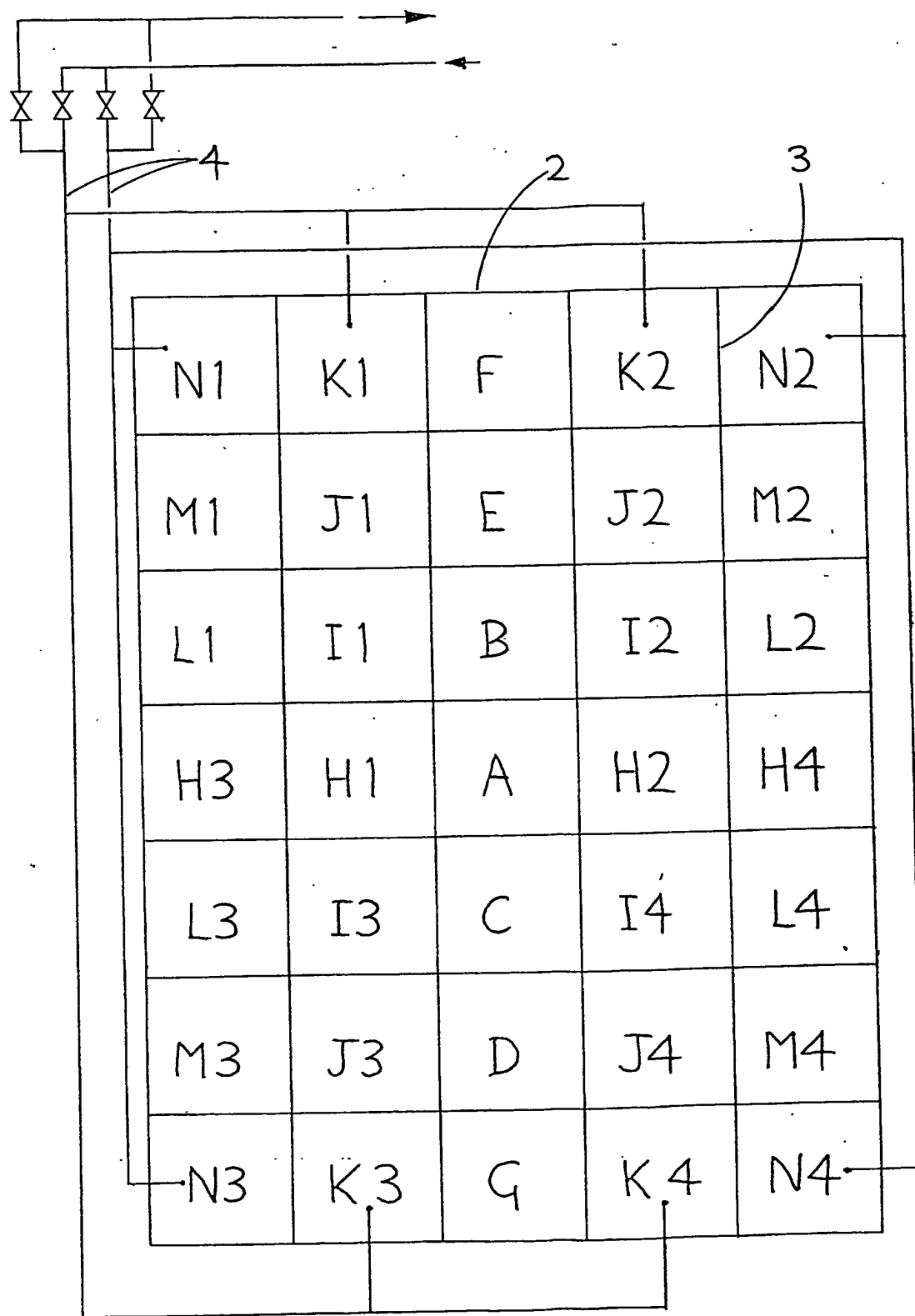


Fig 4

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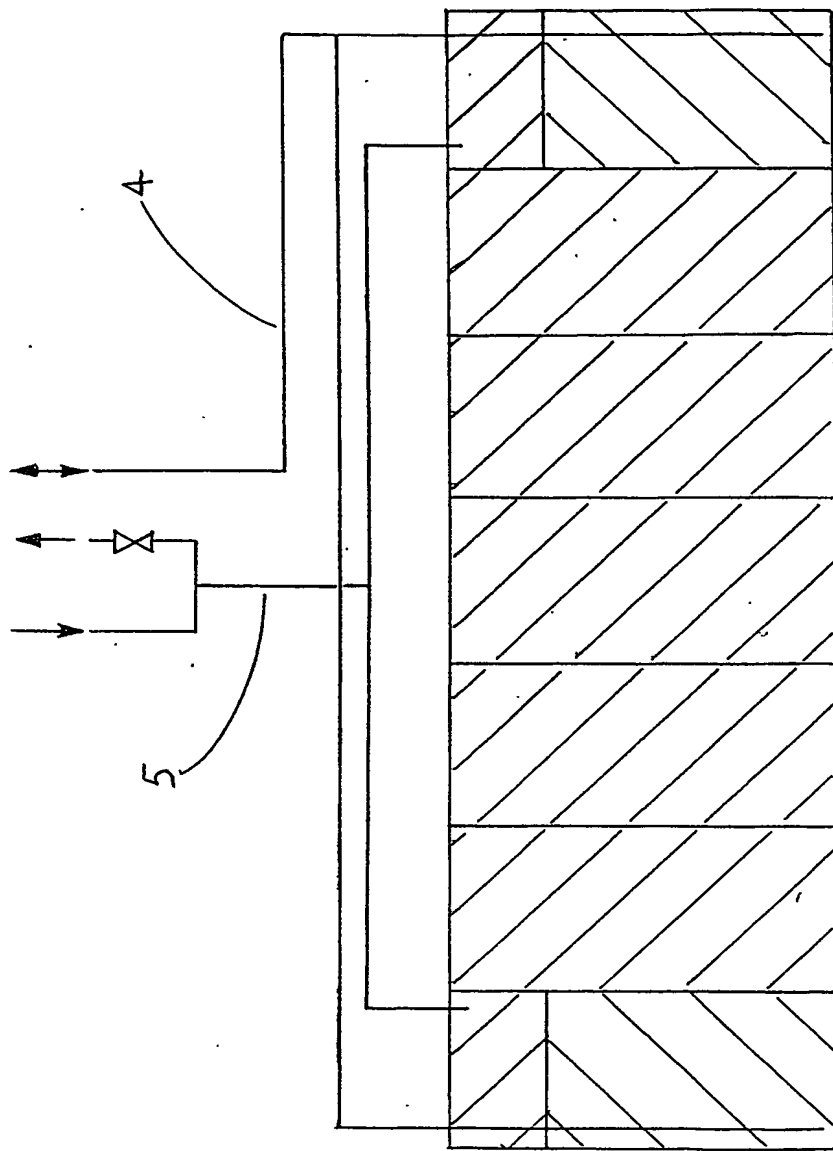


Fig 5

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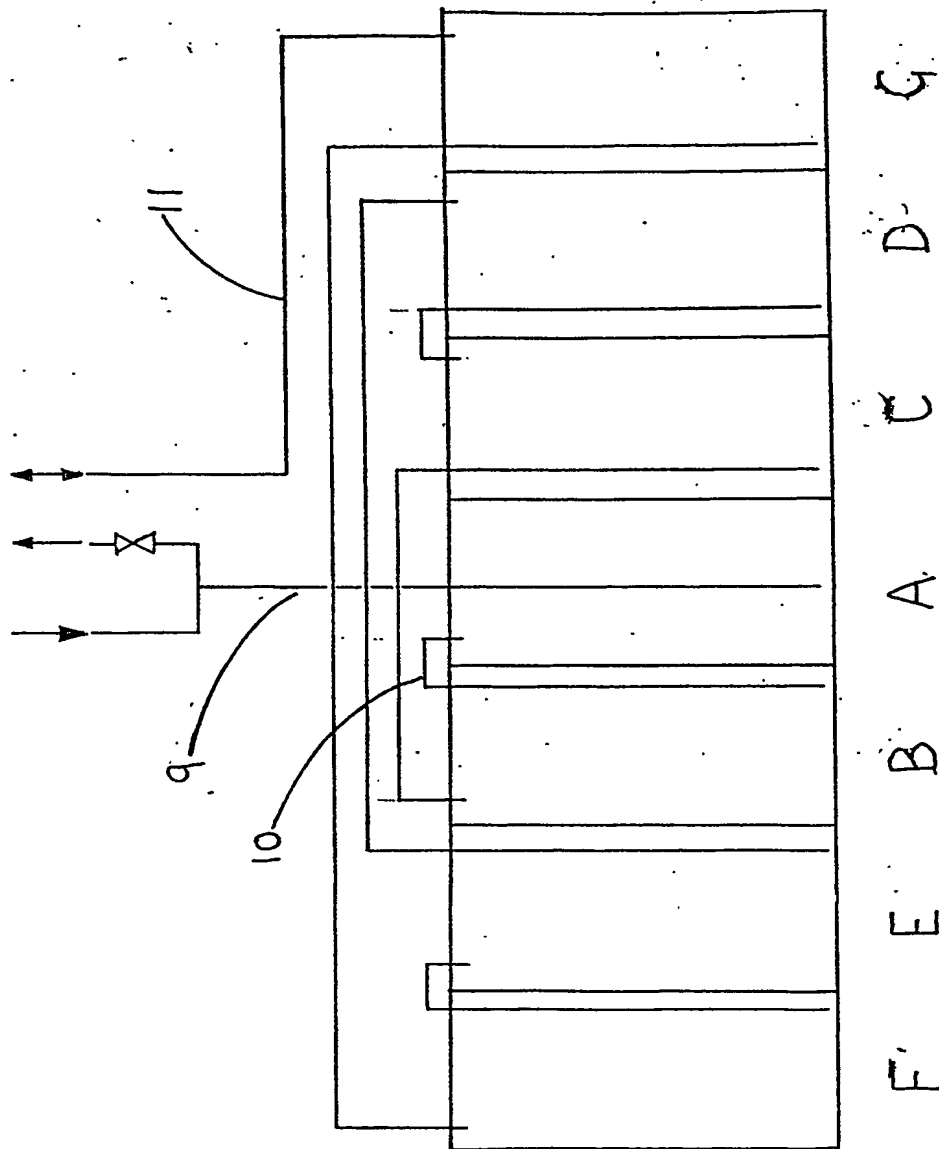


Fig 6

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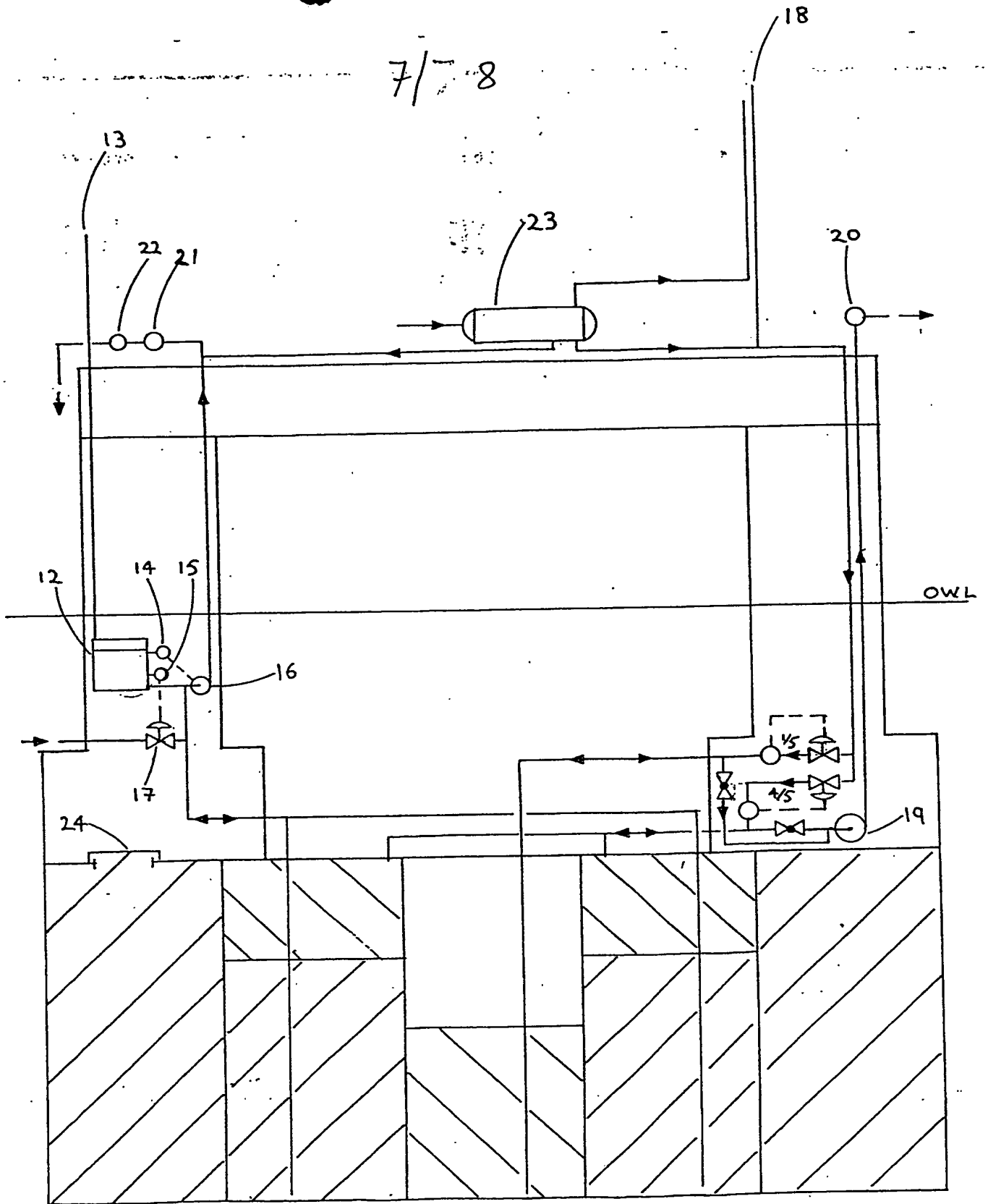


Fig 7



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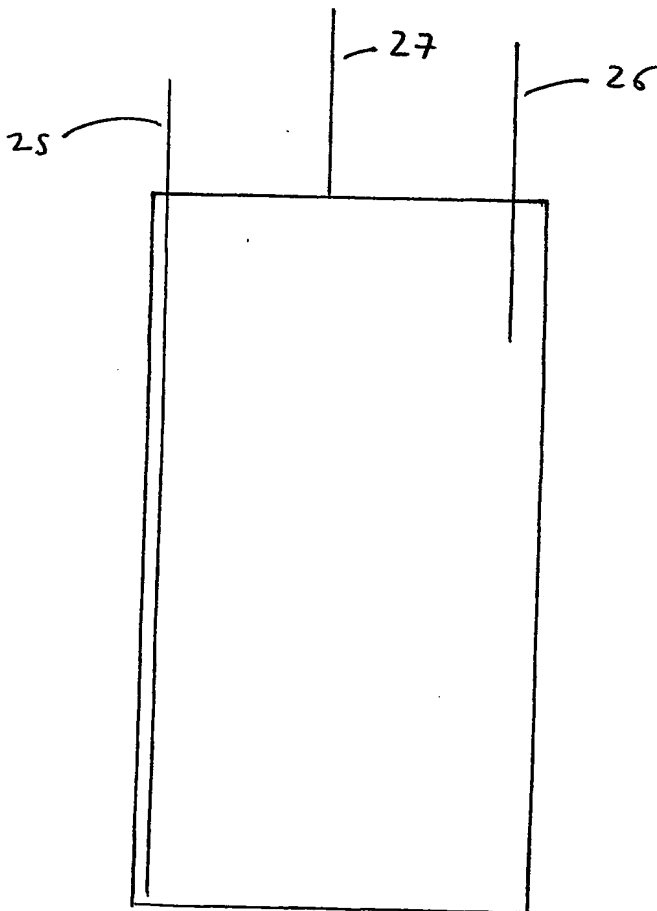


Fig 8

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